

University of Dundee

Travels in Scotland

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Wyvern Poets

Redgauntlet

Waverley

Rob Roy

Marmion

Ivanhoe

Travels in Scotland

Poems for Walter Scott @250

Travels in Scotland

Poems for Walter Scott @250

The Wyvern Poets

In association with the Centres for Scottish Culture and Critical and Creative Cultures (4C) at the School of Humanities,
University of Dundee

UniVerse

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Travels in Scotland

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Introduction

Welcome to the fifth collection by Wyvern Poets, in collaboration with the University of Dundee. 2021 marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), father of the historical novel and, effectively, of a new kind of mass ‘time travel’. Scott’s prolific output exported an image of his homeland with global appeal, if not always scrupulous authenticity. Stuart Kelly’s 2011 biography, *Scott-land*, is subtitled *The Man Who Invented a Nation*, perhaps without too much exaggeration. Scott’s antiquarian vision transformed a turbulent past into a pre-industrial landscape for the Romantic imagination, virtually overwhelming its place of origin or at least melding with it, as he rapidly became one the best-selling authors on earth. John Davidson’s ‘The Salvation of Nature’ (1891) fantasised a future Scotland bought out by an entertainment conglomerate. The World’s Pleasance Company, Ltd. demolishes anything built after 1700, ‘rewilding’ Scotland into a kind of neo-medieval theme park re-staging the past for tourists. Davidson’s story was both satirical exaggeration and backhanded tribute to Scott’s work for bringing history to life in a certain form. Hence this collection considers the many ways in which Scott’s evocative, but also problematic reimagining of his homeland remains relevant to our time and beyond.

Keith Williams
University of Dundee

Ghost Dog Chronicle

I padded back in time and hovered in his study.
Behind the ramp of books, already they were there –
Maida and Camp, the half-wolf and the water-dog,
lying close as they could get
to his desk, to his person.

I was ever jealous of their communication,
any glances, any signs between them,
lines performed for them from *Marmion*, from *Talisman*!
Strewth! *I* should get so far in Master's estimation.
Worship in their fawning eyes. Emotions sky-high coursing.

But Walter craved Miss Mina's puppy-eyes.
The promise of a tryst at Greyfriars Kirk, or more.
Her letter of refusal bruised his pride; his statue of snow melted.
Her name was never mentioned.
The dogs fell silent.

*Sir Walter Scott kept many dogs. The favourites, Maida and Camp,
are immortalised in portraits and sculptural forms.
But which of the others speaks here?
Perhaps Ginger? Nimrod? Spice? Or Titan?*

Bet McCallum

The Pouer o the Imagination o a Wee Hurtit Laddie

Ye hud a less than cannie stert, hanselled in aboon the Cowgate,
wi six sibblings deen afore yer pairt, the prospects wurnae gey great.
Anither trial ye hud at two, ye upped an catcht the polio,
a puir wee shilpit wain ye were: quate, donsie, but nae blate.

Scotia thanks yer faither's fowk, bidin by Smailholm Tower.
They teuk a lame laddie in ther yowk, daing evrythin in therr pouer
Aunt Jenny Scott wiz carin, she gied ye love and guid farin
and taught ye tae read an write, an leart ye local lore.

Each Sandyknowes e'en, efter dine, roon yon bleezin ingle,
ye heard the tales of heroes fine, of border hill and dingle.
And of enchanted Eildon, split in three, by Michael Scott's wizardry,
an then tae bed and restfu sleep, where dreams and legends mingle.

Ye read a mighty wheen o buiks, tae stow yer imagination.
Ye stackit auld warld tales like stuiks, mak'ed ballads by collation.
Gran telt o Willie o Aikwood, and o Auld Wat, a reivin nae guid,
yer life's wark brocht these tales alive, tae a gratefu Scottish nation.

The kintra air it healed ye weel, ye walked again, but lame.
By yer buiks, Caledonia agin did feel, a pride in her martial fame.
Thanks tae gie, I desire; a 'Rob Roy' essay goat us an A in ma Higher.
Ye invented tairtan tourism, and brocht exiled clans back hame.

Roddie McKenzie

Covenant

Gie ower and hearken
tae me, lads and lassies,
and ken the End daesna ayeweys shore
wi oncome o child-heid disease.
Na, it can be, till new strengths rapple,
a bennison of sorts. He, for exemple, this tall Scott man,
paulie and hipple though he is and wis from twa forrit,
spent thon years until he turnt seiven
sloatin up the lair o this land and learnin oor soonds and pratticks.
An he's takken the guid o it, ye'll see. A'll
tak ye doon tae that grand leebrary and there tae show ye his advocate gree;
or tae ither rooms, where piles o his books will lear ye his version
o' how maitters wur, back ance in a day, o knights and the armour they wuir.
Oh aye, and the wean who teething fiver afflictit becam the weel daein man.

Rhoda Neville

The Waverley Wordsmith
Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)

Great Scott! Would he ever have thought
that his wondrous words would be sought,
bought and taught to this present day,
so many years after his birth.

Scotland's blessed with famous writers
and he's up there amongst the best.
Remembered lines from verses read,
what finer words were ever penned.

Sir Walter was a man o' pairts.
Frae a' the airts he gathered tales,
folklore facts to fire up his quill
and enlighten his fellow man.

A friend to poets of his time,
he moved in royal circles too,
promoting his homeland abroad
and we're thankful for that today.

The Honours of Scotland were lost,
our bard instigated a search.
Found one day, syne put on display,
Scott is the jewel in Scotia's Crown.

Lang may his legacy live on;
give thanks for a favourite son.

Aye Sir Walter Scott a great Scot.

George C Robertson

‘The Waverly Line’

On the Wirral and in Liverpool
John Williamson’s ships were famed.
Tis said his barque, Guy Mannering,
could pip the Cutty Sark.
The heroines of the Waverly Line,
the very best to ride the ‘ways,
were three Clyde-built iron clippers,
with scenes from the books arrayed.
Loveliest was Lammermoor,
mistress of wind and tide.
Captained by Duncan of Dundee.
She took New York by storm.
Cedric the Saxon was a ship men loved.
‘Seventeen knots with no fuss about it,’
was Captain Rostron’s claim.
When cargo switched from jute to grain
Cedric joined the Frisco trade.
Then came the day she left New York
for that port where lost ships go,
and the chapter closed on Lammermoor,
on Cedric, and valiant Ivanhoe.

Ann Prescott

Tangled Web

I would describe it
in five letters, *Angst*.
Crazed, would also do
but that is six letters,
far too many to squeeze
into this crowd on the
Royal Mile. A raucous
mob, full of spectacle,
flyers by the score.
'Two for one just for
tonight' he shouts.
And you are? I ask
'Rob Roy MacGregor'
he smiles, feathers
jutting out of his bonnet
like a peacock in full plume.
I look across at the
Scott Monument
he has a wry smile –
'ancient footsteps'
he asks, or 'a tangled web'?

Roy Canning

Story Teller

We sat in Mrs Slimman's English class of 1962
Young girls, suckers for romance and a bit of derring-do
Into our imaginings rode Marmion, handsome, brave and true
A hero through and through

A jealous knight, a lusty nun, honour lost, a battle won
Deceit, betrayal, death and sin, the sorry tale of Marmion
Sir Walter's formula still endures and will never fail to stun
The concept of the hero flawed will run and run and run

Sir Walter did not waste his pen on praising golden daffodils
He wrote about a lovers' tryst tempered with a bitter pill
A hero who, despite his fame, ruthlessly did others ill
To sate his selfish will

Critics decried romanticism and all that that implies
But warnings abound between the lines of this story woven round lies
From behind her walled up coffin we hear poor Constance's cries
Of regret for being used by her lover as she slowly and painfully dies

I realised in that English class that poetry could convey
The full gambit of emotion we may feel along life's way
This epic fairly rolled along and caught me in its sway
A rollicking good story line will always win the day

Two centuries and a half is no mere flash in the literati's pan
This man of parts, sometimes accused, was no unworthy sham
A global success, on the best seller list, when the Waverley series ran
Let's not hesitate to celebrate - Scott, the writer, the poet, the man

Anita Petrie

In Praise o' Bonnie 'Scotland'

My knowledge of Sir Walter Scott
I would have said was next to naught
and yet it seems my whole life long,
I've known his words in rhyme and song.

I've touched Mons Meg, I've seen Rob Roy.
A steamer trip was filled with joy
but all this time I didn't know
how they were linked to 'Ivanhoe'.

So, starting with his Monument,
I'm pleased by just how much I've learned
of how, from inauspicious start,
he grew to be Midlothian's heart.

In this proud year, like it or nay,
Scott's legacy is here to stay.
The people of the world refuse
to bid farewell to this rare muse.

Moirra Gee

Tatiana Wolff

Tatiana Wolff taught English at Loughton High
but through life held a passion she wouldn't deny:
that sixty year stretch of the Romantic writers
who praised old ballads and Gothic architectures
and prized Noble Savages for innate goodness
still uncorrupted by civilisation's mess.

Tatiana learnt that literature displays
faith, social opinion and moods to suit the days.
Social reformers' hopes of Pantisocracy
were left in fretful pieces by guillotine's spree.
But Scott's novels brought antiquarian spirit,
drew men and manners to how history was writ.

Tania posterred *Peveril* on the Underground
to showcase St James's Park, where Kings rode around.
But her deep concern was of Russian authors' pen,
how their works were swayed by English Romantic men.
Zhukovsky, she knew, was inspired by Scott's ballads,
predicted his works would be more than passing fads.

Dr Wolff told that Pushkin would frequently extol
Scott's poetry as excellent food for the soul.
The Waverley novels were translated in haste:
throughout Europe overthrew horror readers' taste.
Scott's colourful treatment of historical past
has left marks round the world which continue to last.

Peter Marshall

Scottish Qualification

A photocopy of an essay, a teenage scrawl on *Waverley*
And another of Scott's novels - that Edinburgh outfit,
The Heart of Midlothian. A meeting for assessment moderation.
No pressure. Just give us your opinion.

But I hadn't got one, not on Scott, nor on the essay.
It seemed alright I guess - tracing arcs - metaphorical journeys.
I'd no idea if it was good or not, or if Scott was good or not.
I'd just never got around to him.

Maybe it was the honorific, or his ever so prolific
Output that put me off. All seemed a bit establishment.
All seemed a bit protestant. All seemed terribly traditional -
I was too cool for the canonical.

I'd been on *The Waverley* once on a school trip to Dunoon,
Watched the pistons in the engine room push the vessel down the river Clyde.
Nothing metaphorical about that, no connection to the man himself –
Not for a boy of nine or ten.

At the meeting, I read about Jeanie Dean and Edward.
I hummed and hawed and, pretending it had made a mark,
Took a MacGregor's leap - *Twelve out of twenty maybe,*
Thirteen? Whatever floats your boat.

Ian Newman

A Marked Man

Twain
said the
American
Civil War
would not
have happened
but for

Walter Scott.
In more
modern times,
would he call
for the fall
of the Scott
Monument?

Gavin Cameron

‘Travails in Scotland’

‘... if a city hasn’t been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively.’ (Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981; Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2001), p.243.)

Early in life you learned the art
of quitting your invalid’s body
Roaming borders of ballad and legend
glens and lochs of the imagination
Your acts of tender preservation
wrapped a culture in words
but also (some would say) aspic

Your repopulated past
came magically back to life
(while present villages were cleared
and Telford’s roads cut clan domains up)
Thronged with tartan avatars
and misted in Romantic focus
like illustrations under tissue
paper in luxurious editions

A map of paradox and contradiction
settled over Scotland
A Unionist magistrate curating
a Jacobite theme park of itself
(relieved it was now safe to do so)
and even kilting Hanoverian Georgie
Would Rob Roy have received
shorter shrift before your bench
than he did in your fiction?

You were probably the first
to industrialise nostalgia
making your native country
the imaginary’s global heartland
Tourists steamed to visit places
your texts reframed, through
stations named in their honour

While those without rail tickets
were virtually teleported
to them by magic lantern
moving panorama shows
and Donizetti operas

You hunker in your Gothic rocket
but will it launch into our future?
Though your works are now
unreadably remote for most
your ghost abides in polymer
banknotes in their pockets.
Your stories long escaped their pages.
They thrive in unanticipated forms
nourished from forgotten sources
in ever more outlan(der)ish
remediations

Keith Williams

Epilogue

Now it's your turn to tell of your travels in Scotland
Insert your account in the space below

The Wyvern Poets

Formed in April 2017 and based in Dundee, Wyvern poets meet monthly to share ideas, try out new poems and support one another with problems and revisions. There is an emphasis on pursuing writing and strong encouragement to publish. To this end, noteworthy poets who live in and around Dundee are welcomed on a regular basis to read their poems and discuss their techniques, working habits and approaches to publication.

The group was founded by Roy Canning and takes its name from a suggestion by Roddie McKenzie that the wyvern has a particular relevance to Dundee, being a component on a Dundee Seal of 1900 and appearing in different forms throughout the city.

Members of the group share a passion for having fun with words and experimenting with verse forms, perspectives, tone, imagery and the music of lines. Their interests are diverse and their writing styles individual. Among many other themes, those of loss and change, landscape and land, history, memory, emerging technologies and urban life recur across the poets' work, encompassing the spiritual, the personal, the social and the political aspects of life. Poems are written in both Scots and English and are at times purposefully humorous or meditative or edgy or provocative.

Extremely interested in all things local, Wyverns keenly collaborate with city institutions on different writing projects: Echo at Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre, poetry publication with Friends of Dundee Law and the combined arts project with Dundee Botanic Gardens. There is especial pleasure in collaborating with the University of Dundee to celebrate literary anniversaries as here and previously on James Hogg in 'Confessions 2020'. Similarly, the Wyvern poets have been pleased to participate alongside the University in recent 'Being Human' Festivals: 'Frankenstein Returns', 2018; 'Aquatic City', 2019; 'New Worlds', 2020, and the forthcoming 'Renewal' theme.

Group members' poems have appeared in The Scotsman, The Courier, The Record, New Writing Scotland, Lallans, Gutter, Dundee Writes, Northwords and Seagate III, as well as on numerous online sites based outside Scotland. Several members enjoy ongoing involvement in the series of monthly Dundee renga curated by Bill Herbert.

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Wyvern Contributors (and Guest)

Gavin Cameron
Roy Canning
Moira Gee
Peter Marshall
Bet McCallum
Roddie McKenzie
Rhoda Neville
Ian Newman
Anita Petrie
Ann Prescott
George C. Robertson

Keith Williams

Biographies

Roy Canning lives in Broughty Ferry and was one of the original co-founders of the Wyvern Poets. He has been published in anthologies, pamphlets and poems written for local cultural events.

Gavin Cameron has been a member of Wyverns since its formation. He also organises the Dundee & Angus region of National Novel Writing Month and runs the Hotchpotch open-mike night for writers.

Moirá Gee is primarily a short story writer whose work has been published in various international magazines. Publication of her third novelette is imminent. She is relatively new to poetry writing and is enjoying the experience very much.

Peter Marshall has spent his adult life near the River Tay. He enjoys experimenting with various forms of words to convey his observations, especially on nature and on emotions.

Bet McCallum lives in Broughty Ferry and London. She has co-authored three books on primary education. Her short stories, brief memoirs and poems have appeared in *New Writing Dundee*, *Gutter*, *Dundee Writes* and *Seagate III*.

Roddie McKenzie lives in Dundee and has published with the Nethergate Writers since 2006. His poetry and short stories have appeared in *Cairn*, *Lallans*, *Dundee Writes*, *Seagate III*, *Poetry Lab Shanghai*, *Tether End*, *Open Mouse*, *Razur Cuts IX*, *Writers Cafe Magazine* and *New Writing Scotland 35*, and in the Scottish Book Trust book 'Rebel'.

Rhoda Neville recently penned the final lines of her second novel, a ghost story, set near her home by the Tay. She also writes poetry and short stories. In 2020, she won the Constable Silver Stag Award for her first (SF) novel.

Ian Newman lives in Broughty Ferry. He has had poetry published in *Gutter Magazine* and was runner-up in The Dundee Comics Prize in 2018. He teaches English and Media at secondary school level.

Anita Petrie lives in Broughty Ferry. Since retiring, she has become interested in writing poetry. She likes to see the world differently through the lens of poetry and literature.

Ann Prescott comes from the Wirral. She has had short stories and poems published in various anthologies. She writes for fun.

George Robertson resides in Broughty Ferry and has been a member of Wyverns since its inception. He writes in both Scots and English, the vehicle used being the one that best relates to the subject. George has seen his work appear in national and international magazines. He is about to self-publish his third, mainly humorous anthology.

Keith Williams is Reader in English at the University of Dundee. He very much enjoys collaborating with the Wyverns on this series of poetry booklets, marking literary anniversaries and the themes of annual Being Human Festival Programmes.



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SCOTT
Celebrating
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